

SLAVERY UNWILLING TO DIE

The Background of Black Oppression in the 1980s

JOE FEAGIN

University of Texas at Austin

Of all the races and varieties of men which have suffered from this feeling, the colored people of this country have endured most. They can resort to no disguises which will enable them to escape its deadly aim. They carry in front the evidence which marks them for persecution. They stand at the extreme point of difference from the Caucasian race, and their African origin can be instantly recognized, though they may be several removes from the typical African race. . . . They are Negroes—and that is enough, in the eye of this unreasoning prejudice, to justify indignity and violence. In nearly every department of American life they are confronted by this insidious influence. It fills the air. It meets them at the workshop and factory, when they apply for work. It meets them at the church, at the hotel, at the ballot-box, and worst of all, it meets them in the jury-box. . . . He has ceased to be a slave of an individual, but has in some sense become the slave of society [Douglass, 1881].

The great black leader, Frederick Douglass, wrote these penetrating words more than one hundred years ago in assessing the widespread racial discrimination that filled the air during the late 19th century. The badges and disabilities of slavery were still pinned to ostensibly “free” black Americans.

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While blacks ceased to be slaves of individuals they, nonetheless, were still "slaves of society." I will argue in this article that this "slaves of society" analysis by Douglass is still useful to assess the Center's "Falling Behind" report for the 1980s, since today, racial discrimination remains a "spectacle of slavery unwilling to die" (Douglas, 1968: 445).

SLAVES OF SOCIETY: A THEORETICAL PERSPECTIVE

INTERNAL COLONIALISM UPDATED

A number of scholars apply the term *internal colonialism* in developing a model of intergroup adaptation in the United States. The internal-colonialism framework owes a debt to the analysts of "external" colonialism. Covering hundreds of millions of individuals, external (white) European colonialism extended into Africa, Asia, and the islands of the oceans. Raw materials from these external colonies sustained the technological development of the mother countries in Europe. External colonialism becomes internal colonialism when the control and exploitation of the labor and/or land of subordinate groups passes to dominant groups within the newly independent society, when the white colonists "run the show" themselves. Internal colonialism emerged out of European colonialism and imperialism, yet it takes on a life of its own. It is a system grounded in the sharp differentiation of white and nonwhite labor. In *Racial Oppression in America* (1972: 57-58), Blauner argues that black Americans are in a type of internal colonization. Forced labor for blacks has been at the heart of this colonial system. Capitalist development reserved free labor for white workers. European-American whites created forced (precapitalist) labor systems within the framework of a larger capitalistic system. The internal-colonial dynamic was most thorough going for the U.S., because it was

here that the correlation between (white/black) race and (free/slave) work status was nearly perfect.

The internal colonialism theory has been utilized by a number of analysts of black-white relations since the late 1960s. It is much more accurate than the more conventional assimilation theories that have been applied to black Americans. Internal colonialism theories accent force, the expropriation of labor, segregation in the extreme, and ideological rationalization; the image is one of blacks being subordinated to certain European-American requirements for the purpose of gaining *labor*. The structure of racial subordination was already well established when non-English whites began to arrive in significant numbers.

In this article I will utilize an updated version of the internal colonialism model to assess the 1984 Center on Budget and Policy Priorities report entitled "Falling Behind: A Report on How Blacks Have Fared Under the Reagan Policies" (hereafter cited as the "Falling Behind" report). But before probing the data, I will first update the theoretical discussion of internal colonialism by drawing from recent research on the slavery and semislavery systems encompassing black Americans from the 1600s to the 1980s. In order to interpret the data in "Falling Behind" it is very important to understand the historical background of a "slavery unwilling to die."

SLAVERY'S ESSENTIAL FEATURES: PERSISTENCE AND CONTINUITY

Table 1 highlights many of the essential features of slavery in the 1641-1865 period. Black slaves were not citizens with rights. They were the only racial or ethnic group explicitly signed out in the U.S. Constitution for subordination and enslavement. About 90% of Afro-Americans were the property of white people. Even in the North many were slaves until the 1850s. The threat of violence in the form of whipping and brutality was high. Residential and job segregation were very

extensive. There were few schools for blacks. Intermarriage was all but impossible, North and South. The badge of color was critical for distinguishing slave and nonslave. A well-developed system of ideological rationalization emphasized the biological and civil inferiority of black slaves as well as of free blacks.

In the next century (1865-1960) the white ruling class introduced certain changes. Constitutional amendments freed blacks from legal ownership as commodities and gave them certain citizenship rights; many of these rights were, however, effectively denied by Supreme Court and executive action from the 1880s to the 1950s and 1960s. Violence and the threat of violence by whites increased as part of the process of reinstating control over freed slaves. Residential, school, and job segregation remained high. After a brief period of political enfranchisement, blacks were denied electoral influence from the 1890s to the 1960s, particularly in the South where most resided in this period. Intermarriage was generally prohibited. Discrimination on the basis of color coding was very high; the ideological justification was similar to that of the earlier period. It is quite clear that from the 1860s to the early 1960s, a century after slavery was legally abolished, that black Americans suffered terribly from the badges and disabilities of a slavery unwilling to die.

Since the early 1960s some additional changes have been made in the semislave system chaining blacks to U.S. society. Again, these alternations have been incomplete, falling far short of dismantling that system. While blacks enjoy more civil rights, there is still, mainly from white police officers in the cities, a serious threat of violence. Residential segregation remains very high, as does school segregation in most non-southern cities. Job segregation is still substantial, with a majority of black men still experiencing unemployment and underemployment conditions or confinement to traditional service jobs and occupations servicing black communities. Black women are also concentrated in traditional "Negro jobs," in

professional/ managerial jobs serving black communities, or in moderate-wage clerical jobs in central business districts encircled by black populations. Color coding remains widespread and critical to persisting discrimination, however subtle and covert, and to the low intermarriage rate. The ideological rationalization for black inferiority has become more sophisticated and is clearly reflected by the adamant white opposition to any *nationwide* government program aimed at aggressively desegregating jobs, housing, and schools.

The overall impression one gets from Table 1 is of persistence and continuity in the basic conditions faced by black Americans since 1640. Certainly there have been important changes, yet black Americans continue to be "slaves of society" on many of the ten dimensions. At least half the changes so essential to effect full liberation for black Americans remain to be made for most categories. We will now review this critical developmental history of slavery and semislavery in some detail.

SLAVERY FROM 1650 TO 1865

THE LEGAL SYSTEM

The North American slave system involved the forcible importation virtually of all the ancestors of black Americans today. Historically speaking, slavery is a form of involuntary servitude in which slaves are owned by others and are deprived of most rights and freedoms. But black slavery was considerably more extreme than slavery in ancient Rome, because black slaves were forbidden by law to get an education or to earn an income for themselves. An essential feature of North American slavery was the denial of basic citizenship and fundamental human liberties. As Du Bois (1935: 10) put it, slaves were not considered human beings, "for they could own

TABLE 1
Basic Features of Slavery and Semislavery: 1640-1986

Basic Features	E r a s		
	Slavery 1640-1865	Semi-Slavery 1865-1960	Semi-Slavery 1960-1986
1. Citizenship (Constitution)	No	Yes	Yes
2. Legal Ownership	Yes	No	No
3. Violence and Threat of Violence	High	Very high	High
4. Job Segregation (Subordinated labor)	High	High ("Negro Jobs")	High, decrease 1960s-1970s, then increase in 1980s
5. Residential segregation	High	High	High
6. School segregation	Extreme (Few schools for blacks)	High	High, then reduc- tion in South until 1980s
7. Political enfran- chisement	None	Low, greater in North	Moderate, stalls in 1980s
8. Intermarriage rate	Extremely low	Low	Low
9. Color coding	High	High	High
10. Ideological rational- ization for Black Condition	Overt (biological) racism	Overt (biological) racism	Covert (biological) racism; overt anti- government inter- vention

nothing; they could make no contracts; they could hold no property; nor traffic in property; they could not hire out; they could not legally marry . . . they could not appeal from their master; they could be punished at will." The number of slaves in the colonies increased from 59,000 in 1714 to 263,000 in 1754; by 1860 there were 4.4 million black slaves in the U.S.

The slaveowner class extracted its profit from the forced labor of African and Afro-American slaves, whose labor in agriculture built up capital not only for planter investments but also for the merchants, shippers, and industrialists of the North. The Civil War represented the culmination of a growing

conflict between the northern capitalist class and the planter oligarchy. Between the 1790s and the 1840s the slaveholding oligarchy dominated the U.S. political and economic system. That ruling class controlled much of the wealth in the U.S., including billions of dollars in slaves, prime agricultural land, crops, warehouses, and other facilities. Most U.S. presidents were slaveholders or sympathetic to slavery. That ruling class also controlled the U.S. Supreme Court, as was made clear in the 1857 *Dred Scott v. John F. A. Stanford* decision, which ruled that the black person had no rights that whites need respect. The emerging industrial capitalists of the northeast, however, relied upon free, waged labor. Conflicts, therefore, were inevitable as the planter/industrialist engaged in battles over western lands, over tariffs, and splits over control of the Democratic party, which in 1860, permitted Abraham Lincoln to become president. The position of black slaves in this situation is instructive. Conservative members of the Republican party negotiated with representatives of the southern planter class and proposed a 13th Amendment of the Constitution that would *guarantee* slavery forever in the South. Lincoln himself was willing to accept this amendment. But the planter oligarchy rejected this “compromise” proposal (Apt-heker, 1984). Ironically, the 13th Amendment added to the Constitution in 1865 legally abolished the slave system.

SLAVERY TO THE NORTH

Recent research has made it clear why many northern Republicans were willing to perpetuate slavery. In the North as well as in the South slavery had long been seen by the majority of whites as legitimate. Significant numbers of slaves could be found in most northern states. The North was built in part on forced labor and, as Ringer (1983: 533) puts it, “despite the early emancipation of slaves in the North it remained there, not merely as fossilized remains but as a *deeply engrained coding for the future.*”

Take Massachusetts, for example. In 1641, three years after slaves were brought in, slavery was made a part of the law. Massachusetts merchants and shippers played a central role in the North American slave trade. An attempt to abolish slavery failed in the Massachusetts House of Representatives in 1767. It was not until the 1780s that public opinion and court cases came together to abolish slavery effectively in New England. Even then, it was *not* a recognition of the rights of blacks, but pressure from the growing number of white working people who objected to having to compete with cheap slave labor that won the day (Higginbotham, 1978: 63-65). By the mid-1600s there were strict slave codes in the North. In 1712 there was a major slave revolt in New York City; fifteen slaves were hanged, starved, or roasted to death. In New York there was great fear of slave revolts. By 1786 slaves made up 7% of that state's population. It was not until 1799 that a partial emancipation statute was passed. However, the statute only freed the children of slaves born after July 4, 1799, and then only when they became 25-28 years of age. All slaves did not become free until the 1850s. But even this emancipation of slaves was linked explicitly to the extreme subordination of free blacks politically and economically (Higginbotham, 1978: 144-149).

An understanding of this entrenched slavery so embedded in the North's legal system is vital for understanding today's internal colonialism. Slave colonialism in the U.S. is not just a southern phenomenon, but an extensive national system of oppression. This is a crucial point for understanding the "Falling Behind" report's findings.

SEMISLAVERY FROM 1865 TO 1960

FROM 1865 TO 1900

The end of slavery as a legal condition did not end the subordination of black Americans. While legal ownership no

longer ruled after 1865, subordination nonetheless persists in an everchanging succession of white yokes. From 1865 to the 1960s legalized segregation became the yoke of control for most southern blacks in the form of the semislavery institution of debt peonage. For the North, the yoke of control involved a similar pattern of segregation effected by informal rather than legal means. The 13th Amendment abolished the legal institution of slavery, but it did not abolish the “badges and incidents” of slavery. After 1865, the essential economic conditions of slavery persisted for blacks, most of whom remained in agriculture. A key problem for blacks was the denial of land by whites. After, just as before, the Civil War blacks were largely excluded from land ownership in the South. And White leaders in the North generally did not support a redistribution of slave plantation land to blacks. As Harris (1982: 30) puts it, this blatant discrimination “locked blacks into a system of perpetual poverty, the inevitable status of people unable to acquire land in an agriculture dominated society.” Most blacks, unlike most white immigrant groups, found themselves in an agricultural society with no access to the sources of wealth.

During Reconstruction newly freed slaves found themselves slipping into new forms of subjugation ranging from tenant farming and sharecropping to debt peonage. In the 1880s, Booker T. Washington described the conditions the theoretically free blacks face on the plantations as “a kind of slavery that is in one sense as bad as the slavery of antebellum days” (Daniel, 1973: ix). The superexploitation of black tenants and sharecroppers was commonplace in the South. In theory the poor black farmer could sell his or her share of the crops, pay off his or her debts, and buy his or her own land. But most were not able to make enough to escape the cycle of debt and to think of becoming landowners. The next step down from sharecropping was debt peonage, when the planter would by force not allow a cropper to leave. Debt peonage involved the creation of laws to keep black laborers from leaving their “employment.” They had limited choices: Suffer quietly under

the burden of debt and semislave working conditions or “run away and be pursued, shot, or beaten; or kill the employer and risk lynching” (Daniel, 1973: ix).

Moreover, when industrialization finally came to the South in the 1890s, blacks there were virtually excluded, except for janitorial-type jobs. Outside agriculture, blacks in towns and cities were largely in the domestic and service jobs so close in lineage to house-slave jobs of the earlier period.

THE WORLD WAR I PERIOD

In 1910, about 83% of black Americans lived in twelve southern states; more than two-thirds of all blacks lived on farms in the South. In the decades just before and after 1910, they began to migrate to the North in significant numbers. There black workers were regularly displaced by the new white immigrant groups, who forced blacks out of job after job (for example, construction) and into marginal, low-paying pursuits. Without this race discrimination associated with waves of white immigrants, “the Harlems and South Chicagos might have become solid working-class and middle-class communities with the economic and social resources to absorb and aid incoming masses of Southerners” (Blauner, 1972: 64).

Rex (1983: 81-91) analyzes the movement of nonwhite peoples from the colonies in the British and other European empires to the great metropolitan cities in the imperial countries. There, the colonial immigrants get the most inferior and marginal industrial jobs, the highest unemployment, and the poorest working conditions. Rex notes that the social immigrants become a “structurally distinct element from the established native working class.” They are clearly viewed as an *outcast* group of *aliens*. Ringer (1983: 536-537) has applied Rex’s view to the migration of black southerners to cities. Blacks migrated from an economically backward region similar to the colonies of the empires. As in the case of colonial migrants to London, they got the most marginal industrial jobs

and were viewed as aliens. Yet unlike the colonial immigrants to Britain, black southerners also migrated into a region with a long history of subordinating black Americans—the slavery and Jim Crow laws.

In the North as well as in the South blacks remained in an internal colonial situation; many were concentrated in occupations tied closely to their prior situation as slaves, especially domestic and service positions. Other evidence of internal slave colonialism can be seen in the rapid displacement of black workers from good occupational niches by white immigrants. A third aspect was the almost total exclusion of blacks from better-paying jobs in the expanding industrial settings. When the white immigration was cut off in the late 1910s and 1920s, blacks finally penetrated the industrial sector, but through the bottom rungs (Ringer, 1983: 535).

A NEW DEAL?

In the 1930s two-thirds of black Americans still lived in the South and in Washington, D.C. Most could not vote. Most black agricultural workers in the South were still wage laborers or sharecroppers; only 13% were owners or managers. As Myrdal phrased it, the background of slavery meant that black people did not enjoy “much of that kind of legal security which is a necessary condition for successful entrepreneurship. . . . The best security has been to become associated with a white person of some status in the community” (Myrdal, 1964: vol. 1, 240).

North and South, blacks remained in low-wage jobs as menials, unskilled workers, domestics, croppers, and agricultural laborers. The Great Depression demonstrated their marginal position. Unemployed whites pushed for menial “Negro jobs,” such as cleaners and domestic workers; white women took the blacks’ restaurant and hotel jobs. Whites in Atlanta organized the Black Shirts under the slogan “No Jobs for Niggers Until Every White Man Has a Job.” By 1932, half

of all urban blacks, most of whom resided in the South, were unemployed. Starvation was often their lot, because less than a fifth received relief aid from southern governments. Private organizations refused to allow blacks into the soup lines. In 1935, in "liberal" Manhattan, two-thirds of the hotels refused to employ blacks, and major insurance companies and retail stores also excluded blacks (Sitkoff, 1978: 37-38).

However, there was one very important change in the 1930s. As public employment programs began to put a million blacks back to work and provided some economic support, however minimal, black voters shifted from a solid Republican vote in 1932 to a solid Democratic vote in 1936. As blacks moved North, their votes counted more. And the Roosevelt campaigns paid some attention. Moreover, the growth of the federal government in the 1930s helped to create a new black middle class. The number of black federal employees increased from 50,000 to more than 150,000 between 1932 and 1941; the proportion of blacks among federal employees was a little higher than their proportion in the general population. Thousands worked in professional and administrative positions, and tens of thousands worked as clerks and secretaries (Sitkoff, 1978; 328). This employment opportunity laid the foundation for the growth of a modest-sized black middle class, which expanded gradually from the 1930s to the 1970s.

But the *overall* impact of the Roosevelt administration reinforced the semislave system. Black Americans suffered much discrimination from New Deal agencies. For example, in FERA relief programs blacks got lower wages than whites, got employed only as unskilled laborers, and were employed only after whites were taken care of. Wye (1972: 634) argues that the New Deal employment programs "depressed the Negro job structure by engaging many workers in job categories below those that they had filled in the private sector of the economy before the Depression began." New Deal housing programs increased the residential segregation of blacks by restricting FHA loans effectively to segregated areas and by locating

public housing in ghetto areas. Moreover, Roosevelt and most of his advisers were unwilling to press for antilynching legislation out of fear of losing the votes of powerful southern congressional members for whom federal legislation was viewed as an assault on states' rights and as northern interference in the South's way of life. As one adviser put it, civil rights was "not to be a primary consideration of the guy at the top. He does his best with it, but he ain't gonna lose his votes for it" (Weiss, 1983: 119).

FROM 1941 TO 1965: THE IMPACT OF WARS

Most black mobility out of the semislavery employment categories has taken place during war periods, including World War I, World War II, the Korean War, and the Vietnam War. During the wars employment conditions of black Americans significantly improved. During World War I white immigration subsided, and black workers were needed to produce war goods. During World War II the demand for workers pulled many blacks into better-paying blue-collar jobs for the first time. During the Korean War, and because of domestic prosperity in the early 1950s, black unemployment dropped to low levels; employment in better-paying occupations again expanded. Yet after all three wars the black employment situation declined significantly. Thus white workers from rural areas poured into cities after World War II, and in 1945-1946 the black unemployment rate went up twice as fast as the white rate. Most jobs opened to them were again in the unskilled and semiskilled categories in line with their traditional semislave position. In 1950, more than half of all employed blacks were still in laborer and domestic service jobs, but less than a fifth of white workers were in these categories (Harris, 1982: 124-131). Again, during the Vietnam War there was significant black mobility into better-paying jobs, with an assistance this time not only from war and prosperity but also from a major civil rights movement.

Yet in spite of wartime progress, by the early 1960s black workers were *further* behind whites in income, occupation, and unemployment than they were in 1945 (Harris, 1982: 131). In 1962, blacks in the prime working group ages 25-44 had an unemployment rate *three* times that of whites; even among the employed, black workers were much more likely to hold part-time jobs. Further, black workers were more likely to be the first fired when layoffs occurred, to have a higher disability rate than white workers, and thus to have a shorter working life than white workers. Blacks were still in a position of a low-wage and surplus labor supply, to be used only when needed.

SEMISLAVERY FROM THE 1960s TO THE PRESENT

THE OPTIMISTIC VIEW

An ahistorical view of black America is characteristic of most recent analysis by scholars and other policy analysts. Even those who look at historical periods, such as Wilson in his *The Declining Significance of Race* (1978), see the post-1960 period as quite different from the past. Wilson develops the argument that the rise of the black middle-class in the 1950s and 1960s was the result of shifting economic conditions and of dramatic new government policies such as equal employment laws and affirmative-action programs. This equal employment legislation "virtually eliminated the tendency of employers to create a split labor market in which black labor is deemed cheaper than white labor regardless of the work performed" (Wilson, 1978: 110-111). The impact of the affirmative-action and equal opportunity laws supposedly increased the number of black Americans holding higher-paying jobs in the expanding service-producing industries, that is, in white-collar jobs. Employment discrimination is viewed as having largely been eliminated. This perspective has often been suggested by

prominent analysts. Indeed, in the late 1960s Daniel Patrick Moynihan (1969: 30), scholar and Senator, asserted that blacks had advanced so much that he recommended a policy of “benign neglect” to the then-President Nixon; blacks he argued, “are being transformed into a stable working-class population: truck drivers, mail carriers, assembly-line workers—people with dignity, purpose, and in the United States a very good standard of living indeed.”

Optimistic analysts also cite the apparent changes in white attitudes toward blacks. They note a shift to a moderate nondiscrimination stance from a blatant discriminatory stance of just a few decades earlier; this attitudinal shift among whites has paralleled the elimination of legal segregation in the U.S. and the token penetration of better-paying nontraditional jobs by black Americans. Optimists note too that a white president appointed a black lawyer to the U.S. Supreme Court (Schuman et al., 1985: 200-205).

THE REALITY

The reality of black America today is quite different from this optimistic portrait. While there have been some important changes, semislavery is still the condition of black America as a whole. The badges of slavery have never been substantially, much less completely, eradicated.

The Center on Budget and Policy Priorities “Falling Behind” report identifies very clearly what that semislavery system means for blacks today. The economic *effects* of persisting institutionalized discrimination are evident. The report documents the point that in terms of real disposable income all categories of black families, from the poor to the affluent, have lost ground since 1980, while 60% of the white population has made significant income gains. Thus the hoary black-white income gap has actually grown during the Reagan years. Both Urban Institute data and Census Bureau data support the conclusion of an increasing black-white income

gap. The report also documents the high unemployment and poverty problems of blacks today. It notes that 36% of all black Americans, and nearly half of all black children, fell below the official government poverty line in 1983. And the extent of black poverty has worsened since 1980. In 1984, the black unemployment rate was 2.5 times that for whites, a ratio up significantly from 1980. The total black unemployment rate was still 16% in 1984. Within the worst-hit group of U.S. workers, the long-term unemployed, nearly one-third are black. These data show there has been a significant deterioration in economic conditions since 1980.

Some of this deterioration has resulted from intentional action on the part of the Reagan administration to improve the tax situation of corporate America, the profits of corporate America, by cutting taxes significantly and by reducing social welfare programs dramatically. Since the late 1960s corporate America has faced intensifying competition from abroad and increased pressure from workers to improve workplace conditions. Corporations have responded by drawing upon the government to improve their profit situation.

The Center's "Falling Behind" report shows in detail the impact of governmental action on blacks since 1980. Cutbacks in federal, social, and economic programs have disproportionately savaged black families. Since blacks make up 25%-50% of the clients of programs like legal services, Pell grants for needy students, AFDC, subsidized housing, and public service employment programs, it is not surprising that they have been very hard hit by the 10%-100% cuts in such programs. In contrast, the massive Reagan tax cuts favor affluent to rich families and, above all, corporations. The total tax burden for poor to moderate-income families rose over the last several years, while the burden for the affluent and for corporations has been reduced very significantly.

The "Falling Behind" report does not discuss the additional problem of reductions in the federal government work force, as well as the ripple effects of cuts in federal aid in the form of

layoffs at the local government level. Cutbacks in Washington D.C. agencies and in state government social programs have in numerous cases meant that a disproportionate number of black employees was laid off. In some cases 30%-70% of those laid off in Washington D.C. have been blacks. Wilson and other optimists are correct about the importance of governmental hiring in expanding the black middle class in the 1960s and 1970s. In 1970 more than half (57%) of black male college students were employed by government, compared to just 27% of whites. One study of the years 1960-1976 found that 55% of the growth in nonagricultural employment for black workers was in the governmental sector; this was more than twice the comparable percentage for whites. And many of these governmental jobs have been in the vulnerable social service areas (Anderson, 1982: 7).

Thus black Americans who moved up into the middle class because of government employment have been hurt significantly by the Reagan corporate-tax-welfare program. And they have been hurt at all government levels because of cutbacks in social programs. Yet these actions on behalf of corporate America are not the main reason for the many socioeconomic problems of black America today. The aforementioned income and unemployment data show that blacks as a group were in bad shape even in the early 1980s. They have gone from bad to worse in the Reagan period. The major reason for this is that the modest equal opportunity programs of the 1960s and 1970s did not eradicate the semislave system's badges and afflictions. So a reduction in those programs only makes an existing semislavery system much worse.

THE BADGES AND DISABILITIES OF SLAVERY TODAY

The Civil Rights Acts of 1964, 1965, and 1968 made many formal acts of discrimination illegal, but they did not end the broad array of blatant, subtle, and covert discrimination in jobs, housing, and education from the 1960s to the 1980s. The

spectacle of slavery unwilling to die can be seen today in many examples:

- (1) restrictions on black voting in many areas of the South;
- (2) most black children still attend segregated schools;
- (3) most black families live in segregated residential areas;
- (4) most blacks seeking housing face informal discrimination by real estate people, landlords, and homeowners;
- (5) most blacks are tried by all-white juries from which blacks have often been excluded during the selection process;
- (6) most blacks face covert and subtle, if not blatant, discrimination in the job market, including promotion barriers.

These features of America are often rationalized as part of a process of voluntary segregation, but that is mostly propaganda for an institutionalized slavery system unwilling to die.

THE JOB ARENA

Many optimistic observers point to the advances that black Americans have made in the job arena. We have just noted the situation in regard to government employment. Now we can look more closely at the general job situation of black Americans. It is true that during the 1960s the number of black professional, technical, managerial, and administrative workers increased dramatically, albeit from a small base. By 1970 just under a fifth held jobs in these categories. And in the 1970s more gains were made in these presumably high-status and white-collar job categories. Yet even here the progress is not what it seems. Nonwhites in white-collar categories are disproportionately concentrated in jobs with lower pay and status than are whites in the same category. For example, within the professional-technical category, blacks today are most commonly found in such fields as social and recreational work, kindergarten teaching, vocational counseling, personnel, dietetics, and health-care work. They are least often found among lawyers and judges, dentists, writers and artists,

engineers, and university teachers. Within the managerial-administrative category blacks are most commonly found among restaurant and bar managers, health administrators, and government officials; they are least commonly found among officer managers, bank and financial managers, and sales managers. And among "clerical" workers blacks are most often seen among file clerks, shipping clerks, postal clerks, keypunch operators, and typists. Black movement into nontraditional jobs in the 1960s and 1970s was not random. Much of the white-collar growth was in clerical jobs for black women—particularly in central business districts surrounded by black communities—in professional jobs tied to black communities (such as health and educational workers), in departments in private industry that serve black communities, in equal opportunity positions, and in federal government jobs, particularly in cities like Washington D.C. with large black populations (Feagin, 1984: 230-32).

During the 1960s and 1970s younger, better-educated blacks did make significant gains in entry-level jobs of better-paying occupational categories. But in the 1980s it has become clear that many of these gains are much less substantial than initially believed, since entry-level positions have become dead-end jobs with little chance of promotion because discriminatory promotional barriers. These barriers have been well documented for the corporate world. Jones's (forthcoming) research on black managers has found that the predominantly white corporate environment, with its intense pressures for conformity, creates regular problems. Jones describes one black manager (Charlie) who was working his way up the lower executive ranks. One day he met with other black managers who wanted his advice on coping with racial discrimination. This was the result:

Charlie concluded that this should be shared with senior management and agreed to arrange a meeting with the appropriate officers. Two days before the scheduled meeting, while chatting with the President at a cocktail affair, Charlie was

sombered by the President's disturbed look as he said, "Charlie, I am disappointed that you met with those black managers. I thought we could trust you."

Black managers are under heavy pressure *not* to support one another even in the face of discrimination. Instances such as this also point up a continuing problem in organizations. The leaders in white organizations are willing, often grudgingly, to bring blacks into important positions but in token numbers and under the existing rules.

Jones (1985) has reported striking racial data from his nationwide survey of a large number of black managers with graduate-level business degrees. Nearly all (98%) felt that black managers had not achieved much equal opportunity with white managers. More than 90% felt there was much subtle or blatant antiblack hostility in corporations; more than 90% felt black managers had less opportunity than whites, or no chance compared to whites, to succeed in their firms solely on the basis of merit and ability. Two-thirds felt that many whites in corporations still believe blacks are intellectually inferior. And most reported that this adverse racial climate had a negative impact on the evaluations, assignments, and promotions of black managers. Moreover, one study at IBM by Hudson (1978) found that light-skinned blacks were promoted at a higher rate than dark-skinned blacks; the color coding of slave days is still in evidence. Even the penetration of educated blacks into nontraditional (entry level) jobs has not brought about the necessary internal changes in corporate climate, in evaluation procedures, in assignments, and in promotions.

Moreover, those black Americans who were able to move into better-paying blue-collar jobs during the late 1960s and 1970s have faced the problems of declining industries. Automation has been one factor. Capital flight is another: many blue-collar jobs, such as those of assembly line workers in high-tech industries, are being exported to Third World countries where the labor is cheaper. Willhelm has developed

this view the most completely of any scholar; while blacks were once needed in the agricultural South, he argues, “today, the economics of corporate capitalism, by turning to automation, makes Black labor unessential; the fact that Blacks still do not own property of production, even though legally possible, and increasingly find their labor is no longer needed for production, they return, once again, to their declassed position under slavery” (Willhelm, 1983: 240).

The majority of blacks who find work usually find it in lower-paying job categories. Contrary to the image of a huge black middle class portrayed in some of the media, blacks are still disproportionately concentrated in the low-paying, lower-status work categories as, for instance, private household workers (such as maids), other service workers, nonfarm laborers, and operatives (such as local truck drivers). Brimmer (1976: 17) analyzed employment data for the 1960-1975 period and found that the major part of the gains for blacks came between 1960 and 1969, with stagnation in the 1970s. In the 1970s blacks’ “occupational center of gravity remained anchored in those positions requiring little skill and offering few opportunities for advancement” (1976: 17).

VOTING AND HOUSING

There is much other evidence for the argument that blacks today confront a slavery unwilling to die. Take voting for example. As Table 1 makes clear, the exclusion of black voters was a basic feature of slavery’s denial of citizenship to black Americans. And that institutionalized attempt to exclude the black vote has been a fundamental feature of this society since slavery. Today blacks are the only large group of minority citizens to face continuing, widespread, and institutionalized attempts to reduce the efficacy of their vote. Davidson (1984) has noted that there are three major types of electoral discrimination: vote dilution, disenfranchisement, and candidate diminution. A major example of vote dilution is the

at-large electoral system. This system has been demonstrated, in cities across the nation, to reduce sharply the participation of black candidates and voters in local campaigns. As long as blacks are a minority of local voters in a city, it can be difficult for them to elect officeholders from their own residential areas. The Supreme Court, in *City of Mobile v. Bolden* (1980), put a heavy burden on minority plaintiffs to prove that at-large electoral systems were *intentionally* set up to discriminate against minorities rather than to demonstrate a severe negative impact that could be lessened by an alternative, more democratic system. In effect, the Supreme Court ruled that indirect or subtle direct discrimination is constitutionally permissible.

A variety of other electoral strategies impose discriminatory impacts upon minority candidates, including a run-off rule in at-large elections, gerrymandering districts, decreasing the number of seats in a government body in a single-member district system, and local (white) slating groups that handpick a token black candidate in order to prevent other minority candidates from having a chance at being elected. In addition to discriminatory vote dilution mechanisms, minority voters in some areas face discrimination in the form of such disenfranchisement devices as purges of voter registration rolls, relocation of polling places with either no notice or short notice, the establishment of difficult registration procedures, and threatening voters with retaliation. These practices have been documented in the states of Alabama, Mississippi, and Texas in recent years. Faced with minority dilution strategies, minority voters may further dilute their voting strength by giving up and staying away from the polls. Candidate diminution is yet another form of political discrimination that black Americans face. This involves attempts to keep minority candidates from running for office. Davidson has noted these examples: changing an office from elective to appointive when a minority candidate has a chance to win (Georgia, Alabama); setting high filing and bonding fees (Georgia); abolition of party primaries (Mississippi); and intimidating candidates

with threats of violence or of cutting off credit (Alabama, North Carolina, South Carolina, Georgia).

As a result of these acts of discrimination (most of which are institutionalized discrimination), black Americans have not yet achieved full representation in the political sphere, particularly in the Sunbelt.

In regard to housing discrimination today we also see the continuation of *massive* segregation and racial exclusion, North and South. Research on residential segregation in U.S. cities in the 1980s has revealed that high levels of racial separation persist. A study by Taeuber (1983) of 28 central cities in large metropolitan areas found only small declines in residential segregation between 1970 and 1980. There has been some increase in blacks living in suburban areas, but researchers note this is mostly because of black residents of central cities spilling over into adjacent suburbs; most suburbanization was in areas extending out from the traditional black residential areas, with many such suburban areas being "zones of transition" from white to black residences. This research suggests there is more contact between blacks and whites than a decade ago, but the contact is often the short-lived result of turnover and resegregation.

Discrimination by landlords, homeowners, and real estate agents is still significant in the U.S. Since the late 1970s there have been a number of important audit studies of housing discrimination mechanisms. The best studies have used a black auditor and a white auditor (of similar backgrounds), who are sent to realtors and apartment rental agents. Studies done in Dallas, Boston, and Denver between 1978 and 1983 found differential treatment favoring the white auditors looking for housing, whether they were owners or renters. In all studies whites were more likely to be shown or told about more housing units than blacks. In a 1981 Boston study white auditors were invited to inspect 17 units, 81% more, on the average, than their black (matched) teammates (Yinger, 1984). A 1983 Boston study found a similar pattern.

A key feature of slavery was the residential segregation of slaves to slave quarters. Even the 1968 Civil Rights Act banning discrimination in housing has done very little to eliminate the informal real estate, landlord, and homeowner practices that keep blacks in the modern-day slave quarters we call ghettos. Even a majority upon the U.S. Supreme Court asserted in *Jones v. Mayer* that "when racial discrimination herds men into ghettos and makes their ability to buy property turn on the color of their skin, then it too is a *relic of slavery*." The promised freedom of the 13th Amendment has not yet been granted, for that freedom includes the right to live wherever a white person can live.

VIOLENCE: ANOTHER DIMENSION OF SLAVERY

Violence cuts across all the periods of black experience tabulated in Table 1. It was a major dimension of slavery; it has been a major dimension of the semislavery systems that replace slavery. During slavery most white violence aimed at slaves fell short of killing. But there was still very extensive violence in the form of beatings. After slavery, from the 1860s to the 1960s, thousands of black Americans were the victims of lynchings, many of those with the collusion of police and judicial officers. Between 1889 and 1940, according to the Tuskegee Institute, about 3,830 people were lynched; 80% were black. Between 1889 and 1916 there were 50 to 161 lynchings of black *every* year. The number dropped slowly to 10-24 lynchings per year in the 1930s, with 1-6 a year from 1938 to the 1950s. At least half the lynchings were carried out with police authorities participating; in most of the other cases the police winked at the community action (Myrdal, 1964: 2-5). In addition, Wright (1985) estimates that at least half the lynchings of blacks never got counted. This is particularly the case of quiet lynchings without the formation of a mob. One also needs to add to the legal lynchings the cases where, if vigilantes would hold off on a

lynching, police and court officials gave a black man a speedy trial and execution.

Violence against blacks was very widespread in the 1920-1960 period. Short of murder, much brutality was aimed at black workers in agriculture and industry. In assessing white violence against blacks in the South in the 1930s and 1940s Myrdal noted a continuum, ranging from mild admonition to murder; this violence "has its origin in the slavery tradition" where physical force was used by masters to keep slaves in line. In the 1930s and 1940s this tradition persisted: "if a plantation owner cheats or beats his Negro tenants, 'that's his business'; if a Negro is the victim of a sudden outburst of violence, 'he must have done something to deserve it.' Above all, the Negro must be kept in his 'place' " (Myrdal, 1964: 2-559).

There were some lynchings in the North, but more characteristic of antiblack violence were the riots. Numerous riots aimed at keeping blacks in their place occurred in northern cities during the 1900-1920 period. For example, in 1908 a crowd of whites moved through the black area of Springfield, Illinois, and burned black-owned buildings, flogged 50 blacks, and lynched two blacks, chanting as they went, "Lincoln freed you, we'll show you your place" (Sitkoff, 1978: 15).

Since the 1950s white violence against blacks has attacked civil rights activities and invoked police brutality. During the civil rights movement period, from the mid-1950s to the mid-1960s, more than 100 black and white civil rights activists were killed. And for a century police officials have murdered many blacks. As Willhelm (1983: 261) has noted, when the killings of blacks by police officers "are totaled over a decade it is fair to conclude that they amount to a massacre," for between the late 1960s and the late 1970s some 6,000 people were killed by the police; about 45% were black. Police brutality aimed at black Americans is not just a matter of killings; it also involves the widespread use of excessive force, such as beatings, harassment, false arrest, and verbal abuse. Moreover, over half of those executed for all crimes in the U.S.

since 1930 have been black. Much of the crime committed by black Americans is, at bottom, an individualized slave revolt. Willhelm (1983: 273) phrases it as follows: "As Blacks become increasingly useless in an automated society, and turn to crime with greater frequency in order to obtain the material needs of life, they confront a White America increasingly determined to meet crime with state violence." High crime areas—the ghetto areas—are often called "combat areas" by the police, and many observers have talked about the undeclared war between youth and the police. Whites meet black crime with repression rather than a massive job program. Black Americans seem to be the *only large minority* to receive so much violence at the hands of white authorities. This omnipresent violence is not just a contemporary scourge. It is directly linked in a long historical chain to the violence of slavery.

A FUTURE OF SLAVERY?

As the "Falling Behind" report's data make evident, the modest black progress brought by wars and government intervention programs since the 1940s has begun to erode. The semislave system remains firmly in place in regard to employment, housing, and educational segregation as well as in terms of violence, ideological racism, color coding, and resistance to intermarriage. The likelihood of future change without militant black action is close to zero. The ideological position of white Americans is one of vigorous opposition to any significant government program, whether it be affirmative action in jobs or prosecution of homeowners and realtors who discriminate. If desegregation means a few black employees at work, a few students in the schoolroom, or a few black families in the larger residential neighborhood, that type of desegregation can be tolerated. But more substantial desegregation is not acceptable to most whites, nor do most whites favor federal government intervention to see to it that blacks get fair treatment in

jobs or housing. Between 1964 and the mid-1970s public opinion surveys asked whites four times about government intervention to guarantee such fair treatment in jobs. In every survey only 36%-39% of whites explicitly supported government action. And the last survey, taken during the 1970s had the *lowest* percentage. On a similar question about government intervention to get rid of segregation in schools, the proportion of whites supporting federal action *dropped* from 42% in 1964 to only 25% in 1978. In surveys from 1973 to 1983 the proportion of whites supporting a law prohibiting race discrimination by a homeowner never reached the level of a majority, although unlike the two aforementioned cases the percentage did increase from 34% to 46% (Schuman et al., 1985).

A majority of white Americans still believe that the tremendous imbalance of power, reflected in the system of semislavery we have discussed here, should *not* be eradicated by race-conscious action. This does not bode well for the future of blacks in the United States.

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Joe Feagin is Professor of Sociology at the University of Texas (Austin). He is the author of sixteen books, including Discrimination American Style, Ghetto Revolts, Racial and Ethnic Relations, Modern Sexism, and also of seven dozen articles in social science journals. His research interests and writings focus on racial and ethnic relations, social problems, and urban political economy.